family, *Sphargis mercurialis,* is common on the coasts of the Mediterranean, and is supposed to have furnished the body of the ancient lyre; and hence the tortoise was dedicated to Mercury, the fabled inventor of that instrument. It is however scarcely probable that the ancients generally discriminated between the different marine species,—those three at least which are covered with horny plates,—excepting for the purposes of commerce.

It was probably to *Terrapene europæa,* the common lake tortoise of the South of Europe, that the death of the celebrated dramatic poet Æschylus was attributed; as Pliny distinctly states that the eagle, through whose means the catastrophe occurred, is a frequenter of lakes. He, to avoid the fulfilment of an augury, which threatened him with death by means of a falling house, is said to have gone into the fields, where an eagle, carrying aloft a tortoise in his talons, and mistaking the bald head of the poet for a round smooth stone, let his prey fall upon it in order to break the shell, and broke, instead thereof, the skull of the gifted and eloquent victim of this fatal mistake*.

It is unnecessary however, and would be equally unsatisfactory, to trace the vague and uncertain notices given by the writers of the earlier ages, respecting these animals. Even when the mutual intercourse of distant countries had become greatly extended, and commerce had gradually enlarged our information respecting the natural productions of the remotest parts of the world, the animals in question still remained little known and imperfectly distinguished. It matters little, indeed, what species were known to such authors as Aldrovandus, or Bontius and Piso, or what were the originals intended to be represented by the barbarous caricatures, which rather obscured than illustrated the works of that period. But passing by the older writers, it is matter of no small disappointment to find that even the great Father of method, the illustrious Lin-

* "Tertii (generis Aquilarum) Morphnos, quam Homerus et Percnon vocat, aliqui et Plancnum, et anatinam, secunda magnitudine et vi: *huicque vita circa lacus.* Ingenium est ei testudines raptas frangere e sublimi jaciendo: quæ sors interemit poetam Æschylum, præditum fatis (ut ferunt) ejus diei ruinam secura cœli fide caventem." *Plin. Nat. Hist.* lib. x. cap. 3.

It is a curious coincidence that the eagles of South Africa are generally believed to have a similar instinct to that attributed to the species alluded to by Pliny. The account is given in the Voyage of Kolbe to the Cape of Good Hope; but as I have not the work to refer to, I give it as quoted by Daudin. "Suivant ce voyageur les grands aigles de mer, nommés *orfraies,* sont très-avides de la tortue; malgré toute la force de leur bec et de leurs serres, ils ne pourroient briser sa dure enveloppe; mais ils l'enlèvent aisément, ils l'emportent au plus haut des airs, d'où ils la laissent tomber à plusieurs reprises sur des rochers très durs; la hauteur de la chûte et la très grande vîtesse qui en résulte produisent un choc violent; et la couverture de la tortue, bientôt brisée, livre en proie à l'aigle carnassier, l'animal qu'elle auroit mis à couvert, si un poids plus considérable avoit résisté aux efforts de l'aigle pour l'enlever dans les nues." *Daud. Hist. Rept.* ii. p. 300.

næus, is so vague and general in his specific characters, as often to leave us to mere conjecture as to the species which he designs; the characters of which he constitutes his specific distinctions being, in many instances, such as apply generally to a whole group, and, with some exceptions, to the greater part of the order. Of him in fact who consults the genus Testudo of the *Systema Naturæ,* it may be said without exaggeration, in the words of Schœpff, "Inveniet enim nomina vaga, descriptiones plerasque mancas, ambiguas, in diversissima sæpè quadrantes animalia, immo et diversissimis applicatas." Gmelin indeed acknowledges, "Similitudinem structuræ in generalibus, varietatem singularum specierum pro varia ætate, cognitionem plurium in variis vitæ periodis imperfectam esse, et difficilem reddere testudinum diagnosin et mancam illarum historiam." In this passage are contained the most striking causes of that uncertainty and vagueness which rendered the *Systema Naturæ* so unsatisfactory an authority, as it regards these animals; still it must be granted that this great naturalist ascertained, with considerable accuracy, the characters which distinguish the marine, the lacustrine, and the terrestrial forms; and it is probable that, had he been acquainted with a greater number of species, he would have acquired those accurate views of the relations and value of their characters, which would have constrained him to multiply his genera, and probably also to appreciate the real rank and importance of the whole group.

There cannot be a higher practical attestation to the merits of this extraordinary man, than the fact, that even the most bigoted admirers of modern systems, who follow novelty for its own sake—no less than those more original and philosophical investigators of nature, who are obliged, by the very increase of their information, to acknowledge the deficiencies of his system—are constrained to adopt most of his groups, though they may assign to them a different grade in the scale. It is unpleasing to witness the paltry attempts which are every day made by the pygmies of science, to underrate and cavil at the views of that giant mind, whom they only affect to depreciate because they are unable to comprehend him. It is not, however, to the servile herd of imitators, that this attempt to preach a sort of crusade against the merits and memory of Linnæus is confined: some of the most gifted of our contemporaries, whose talents and acquirements give them a legitimate claim to more positive and independent

THOMAS BELL *A Monograph of the Testudinata* LONDON, 1832-1836 THE ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES OF PHILADELPHIA Octavo